The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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0:01:03 Jacob: Thank you for joining me today and thanks, everyone, who is joining live for another episode of The Future of Work with your host, Jacob Morgan. And today I am joined by Whitney Johnson, who I'm sure a lot of people watching and listening are familiar with. She is ranked as one of the 50 leading business thinkers in the world. She's the author of numerous books, including Disrupt Yourself, with a new introduction. I think that came out fairly recently. And then, you've written several other books as well like Build an A-Team and Dare, Dream, Do. LinkedIn influencer with almost two million people hanging on her every word as she helps everybody basically figure out how to thrive in this rapidly changing world of work. So, Whitney, thank you so much for joining me today.

0:01:53 Whitney: Oh, I'm delighted to be here. Thanks for having me, Jacob.

0:01:55 Jacob: So, first question for you, of course I have to ask, how have you been doing with the whole coronavirus thing that's going on? Has it impacted your work and your life at all?

0:02:05 Whitney: Yeah, that's such a great question, and thank you for asking that. You actually just reminded me of something that I'm trying very hard to do, and I don't do very well, which is to not go straight to the task and actually ask how people are doing. So, thank you for modeling that behavior. I think the short answer is that we're very grateful none of us in our family have been affected by in terms of getting ill. So, we're grateful for that. From a business perspective, absolutely affected by it. A lot of my revenue comes from keynote speaking. And so, as you can imagine, I'm not doing very much keynote speaking right now. At the same time, because the work that I do is about personal disruption, it's really an opportunity for me to eat my own cooking as it were and talk about, "Well, what do you do when you get disrupted? Let's figure that out." So, that's been an opportunity.

0:02:58 Jacob: Well, I'm in the same boat. Both my wife and I, we're authors. We're speakers as well. And just like you, most speeches have either been postponed hopefully till sometime next year, in some cases even cancelled. But it actually brings up a very interesting point. So, how have you had to disrupt yourself during this time?

0:03:17 Whitney: Yeah. Well, one thing that definitely has been disrupted is not traveling, and that's been really nice. But to answer your question, "How have I had to disrupt myself?" Well, one way is that I have noticed something is that I really like lists and being able to get things done. So, here's my list of 10 things I'm gonna do, and then I get all those things done, and then I'll feel very organized. And I think, historically, because I would travel and then I'd be at home and then I travel and be at home, I had these really clear definitions of my schedule where I could get something done and then I would go on a trip or I get things on a trip and then I come home. And now, there's

this huge blurring of lines. And so, I'm having to figure out and practice building in boundaries and figuring it out how to trust myself to keep those boundaries because the natural boundaries aren't there. And so, that's been a really interesting challenge for me in terms of just thinking about how I organize my time and realizing that I probably spend... I think I have more time than I do, and it's now become more apparent because I'm home.

0:04:25 Jacob: And you've also had to shift, I know, towards a lot of online stuff, right? Don't you do your LinkedIn Lives, is it every Tuesday or every... I think it's every Tuesday, right?

0:04:34 Whitney: It's actually every Tuesday and Thursday. And one of the things...

0:04:36 Jacob: And Thursday, okay.

0:04:37 Whitney: Really, I think, interesting for me, and I wonder if you actually felt this way, is that when the crisis first hit in the United States, there was this tendency for me, and I suspect for a lot of people, like, "I need to do something, I need to do something," and wanting, scurrying around trying to do something. And there were a lot of things like that, but there was one thing that I was really clear on that I needed to do and that was doing a LinkedIn Live. And so, I'm starting... I don't know, it's probably been six weeks ago now I committed to do a LinkedIn Live every day, and I did it for 16 days straight.

0:05:10 Jacob: Wow.

0:05:11 Whitney: And then after that 16 days, I realized that wasn't sustainable, but I committed to do it Tuesday and Thursday, this idea of, "If we're gonna manage the disruption, we need to disrupt ourselves. And so, what does that look like?"

0:05:24 Jacob: Yeah, no, it's not easy to shift and do all these other things, so I totally agree. It's a challenge, but it's great to see that you are, like you said, eating your own food, disrupting yourself, focusing on all of these virtual things, which is fantastic. What about just in general, have you seen from a lot of either your friends, your peers, clients of yours, just in general, how COVID-19 is disrupting work?

0:05:55 Whitney: Oh, yeah. It's interesting because... Yeah, I think about some of my clients were... They were used to going into the office every single day and having their processes of work built around them being able to see each other, being able to walk 10 steps and be able to have a conversation. And their whole process was built around that face-to-face interaction and having to figure out how to interact with people remotely and then set up processes to do that. I remember, initially, people were like, "Well, how do we get 100 people on Zoom? How do we hold a meeting remotely?" And it was actually interesting. I had a conversation with a friend of mine or a colleague, Cali Yost, who's been focused on work-life fit and how do you do remote work. And all of a sudden, all of these people who were not interested in remote work were like, "How do you do remote work?" because no one knew how to do it. So, I think that that was a very big disruption and fascinating to watch how companies have adapted to that.

0:07:00 Jacob: Yeah, it's crazy that lot of these organizations who didn't have these flexible work programs are now scrambling to put them into place. And I think, probably the biggest thing is, as you've talked about many times, is this idea of disrupting yourself and why it's so important. So, maybe we can jump right into that and we can start off with what does disrupting yourself mean?

And why is it actually so important for everybody to do?

0:07:24 Whitney: Yeah, okay. So, let's talk about the term disruption, first of all, 'cause it's a term we hear and I'm using it in a very specific way. So, Clayton Christensen of the Harvard Business School, my mentor, he coined that term disruptive innovation. He talked about it in the book, Innovator's Dilemma, which he was on the cover with Andy Grove of Intel probably 15 years ago now. But the basic idea is that it's a silly little thing that can take over the world, like the telephone did to the telegraph, like the automobile to the horse and buggy, and more recently, Netflix has disrupted Blockbuster, etcetera. So, that's the idea of a disruptive innovation or product to disrupt a company or a country. The way I'm using it is personal disruption is how do you take all of these ideas and make them meaningful to you? You start at the bottom of a ladder, you climb to the top, and then you jump. The big difference with personal disruption, that was the insight that I had, is that with personal disruption, you're Netflix and you're Blockbuster, you're Uber and you're cabs, you're this silly little thing and you're taking over the world because you are disrupting you.

0:08:30 Whitney: And the reason it's so important is it if you think about us as agentic beings, we're made to act and not be acted upon. And if we're surrounded by disruption, we have to make a choice. Are we going to drown in that disruption or are we going to... Where are we... Not even "or." Are we going to drown in disruption? The other possibility is that we cannot drown, but we can just rock back and forth in the swell of the wave and not much happening, or are we going to make the decision to act and figure out a way to surf that disruption? It doesn't mean you're gonna be in control completely, but when you make that decision to act and not act upon, you use that disruption as a tool of creation rather than it using you as a tool. Then, you're able to find that calm within that chaos. And so, the only way that we can actually manage the disruption is to disrupt ourselves and figure out what we're gonna do to surf that wave of disruption.

0:09:29 Jacob: It's kind of interesting because as you said, you are Blockbuster and you are Netflix. So, you're fighting against yourself sometimes, which I would imagine a lot of people find pretty challenging because it's so comfortable to be Blockbuster and just, "Things are going okay, and we're hanging out. We don't see any potential changes in the near future." And then all of a sudden, you get... I think, as Mike Tyson said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face."

0:09:55 Whitney: Exactly. And Jacob, I would say, even when things aren't okay. I think because... Judith Glaser, a psychologist who passed away a couple of years ago, said that "We're all, if you look at the neuroscience, we're all addicted to being right." So, even when things aren't okay, we're actually addicted to things not being okay. So, personal disruption is making the decision to disrupt ourselves when things are okay and even when they're not okay. I think the thing that's exciting about right now, and I use this term very deliberately, is that we've all been on this S-curve of learning. And typically, when we're on an S-curve, we have to make a decision. Am I going to jump? Am I going to disrupt myself or not? And in this instance, we haven't had to. We haven't gotten to make the choice. We've all been pushed. And while that is very difficult and challenging, it's also an opportunity for us to reset.

0:10:47 Jacob: Yeah, couldn't have said it better. So, do you have any... After this, we'll talk about the S-curve and some of the steps that you talk about, but do you have any examples of what self-disruption might mean? Is this like a career change, learning a new skill? What does that actually look like after it happens?

0:11:11 Whitney: Yeah, it's all of the above. Let's talk with the most, perhaps, obvious or easily understood. And I'll give you an example from my own life and career. So I'm working on Wall Street. I'm an equity analyst, institutional investor-ranked. I'm covering two categories. This is like 2004, 2005. I've now read the Innovator's Dilemma by Clayton Christensen, had this kernel of an idea that this theory of disruption isn't just about products, it's about people. So, here I am. I'm at the top of my game. I'm doing really well. I'm making a decent living. And I make the decision to leave Wall Street and go become an entrepreneur. And I remember my boss saying to me, "You are going to regret this decision." It's that decision that people look at you. They think that you've lost your mind. You're making a choice to become a silly little thing. That's a typical example of what personal disruption can look like, and you can do it inside of an organization and then you can do it on a micro level every single day when you reflect at night, "Ha! Well, I did these three things today. These two things worked really well. I'll do more of that tomorrow. This one didn't work so well. Okay, I'm gonna adapt tomorrow." That decision to make a change is disrupting who you are, basically stepping back from who you are to slingshot into who you can be.

0:12:34 Jacob: One of the things I always say, and I talk about this in my new book as well, is that if you can improve by 1% a day, by the end of the year, you're 37 times better. So, it's making those really gradual small changes that you can commit to everyday and then over time, you start to see massive, massive change.

0:12:49 Whitney: Yeah. So.

[laughter]

0:12:52 Jacob: So, I like that you say it can be micro, so something like 1% a day. It could be major like reading Wall Street and becoming an entrepreneur. And you also gave another example of inside of an organization. So, what might that look like inside of an organization?

0:13:07 Whitney: Yeah. So, inside of an organization is you've been... Let me see if I can give you a specific example. You've been in a role. Let's say you've got a strong technical role, the CTO. Actually, let me give you... I have a perfect example for you. Okay. So inside of an organization, Vala Afshar, you may have heard of him. He's the Chief Digital Evangelist for Salesforce.com. So Vala is running hardware, software, quality testing inside of a company called Enterasys. They get a brand-new CTO. And he comes to him and he says, "Hey, Vala, I want you to go into customer support." And Vala is like, "What?" No one wants to go from being an engineer into customer support, right? In most organizations.

0:13:55 Jacob: Yeah.

0:13:56 Whitney: "No, we're gonna have you do this. This is gonna be the most important move of your career." He's like, "No, no, no, no." But the boss says, "Go." So Vala goes. A couple years later, it turns out Vala is very good at customer service. He has about seven call centers under his operation. He's so good at customer-facing activity, when they need a new CMO, he becomes the Chief Marketing Officer. So, he's been completely disrupted, had a lot of roles and responsibilities taken away, takes a step back, but then that allows him to slingshot him into becoming the Chief Marketing Officer. And then as you know today, he's the Chief Digital Evangelist at Salesforce.com. So, inside the organization, it's a stepping back, frequently, to do something that you think doesn't quite make sense. It's a lateral move, but the idea is that you can move up much faster from that new role. You've got a new trajectory that allows you to grow up much faster.

0:14:51 Jacob: It reminds me of, so people who have ever gone hiking or mountain climbing, it's sort of like you're trying to get to the top of the mountain, and you go up one path and realize that it's maybe not the right path. So, you have to go back down, actually. So, you lose some of the work, some of the ascension, go back down a little bit, and you find another path that does let you get to the top. So, I love that example 'cause sometimes it can be a lateral move. Sometimes you are actually taking some steps back. But it seems like it's really about more thinking of the longer term and the bigger picture instead of the shorter term.

0:15:23 Whitney: Right? Absolutely. If you think about it, for anybody who's listening, who's a finance person, it's like, whenever you're making an investment, you look at the discounted cash flow, or investing in property, plant and equipment. In the near term, you're parting with your hard-earned cash. And the reason that you do is because you believe in the future, there will be a return on that investment. It's the same idea.

0:15:45 Jacob: Okay. All right. So now we talk a little bit about what that means. Why do you think it's so crucial? Because there might be some people listening who are saying, "Hey, you know what? Things are going pretty good. I have a good job. Business is going well. Why do I need to think about disrupting myself and sacrificing any short-term cash flow or benefits that I have?

0:16:08 Whitney: Well, I think the shorter answer is, is you may not need to do a wholesale, large-scale disruption. And so, in that instance, is if you're on a path and it makes sense and you wanna keep going, absolutely. What I would say to you, though, is that you still probably wanna do these micro disruptions, to the research that you just cited of getting 1% better every day. If you're willing to change every day, basically disrupt yourself better every day, you're gonna get better that much faster.

0:16:41 Jacob: Yeah.

0:16:42 Whitney: If that doesn't work, if people aren't motivated by getting better a lot faster, what I would say is, you think about you get to the top of a mountain if you will, to use your analogy, and what looks like a plateau could over time, if you're not disrupting yourself, you get very complacent, and so that plateau can become a precipice. And so, the question you have to ask yourself is, do I wanna jump or do I want to get pushed? When you jump, you're acting. When you get pushed, you're going to feel pushed, and it will feel like a failure. And it's a very different equation around resilience and rebounding than if you've chosen to jump.

0:17:23 Jacob: Okay, makes sense. Well, maybe now we can jump in into the S-Curve and into those seven steps because I love the way you outline them. You talk about them in your book. You talk about them a lot during your LinkedIn Lives as well. So, can you share a little bit about the S-Curve, and then maybe we can go through what those steps are?

0:17:42 Whitney: Yeah, absolutely. So I talked about this first big insight was that disruption isn't just about products, it's about people. The next big insight that I had was that this S-Curve that was popularized by Ian Rogers in 1962 to help us figure out how quickly does an innovation get adopted. And right now we're looking at viruses, how quickly does it spread. And the idea is, at the base of the S the growth is slow until you reach a tipping point or you near the curve and you move into hyper growth. And then you get to saturation, the growth tapers off. Well, that insight was is that the S-Curve could help us understand how we learn. It could help us understand how we grow,

how we develop. So, whenever you start something new, you are at the base of an S. Whether it's a new project, it's a new job, whether it's dealing with COVID-19, you're at the base of the S and growth is happening, but it can feel very slow. It can look like a slog.

0:18:38 Whitney: But knowing that helps you avoid discouragement. And then you put in the effort, and you accelerate competence and confidence and engagement. And this is where things in a little time a lot happens unlike at the low end where, oh, it took a lot of time for a little to happen. You know enough, but not too much. It's exciting. It's thrilling. You're exhilarated. You're engaged. And then you get to the top of that S-curve where you're like, "You know what? I've got this all figured out. I know what I'm doing. And I love this work. And I love this assignment. And I love this role, but I'm starting to dial it in. I'm starting to get a little bit bored." And so now I'm experiencing that dilemma, personal disruption, because if I do jump, it's kind of scary. But if I don't jump, it's also scary. And so the idea of personal disruption is, you move up that S-curve, you learn and then you leave and then you repeat. You do that over and over again, and the faster you're able to do it, the higher-growth individual you can become.

0:19:34 Jacob: I think it's also probably important to note that this is not like a static thing, right? Do you go through personal disruption several times? It's not as if you just do it once and then you're done, right? It's a ongoing...

0:19:45 Whitney: Oh, yeah.

0:19:46 Jacob: Okay.

0:19:47 Whitney: Yeah, yeah, it's an ongoing process. And actually, Jacob, I would say it's a fractal. 'Cause if you think about, your life is an S-curve. Your career is an S-curve. Any job is, any project. And you could be on multiple S-curves at any given time.

0:20:01 Jacob: Yeah, and especially with... People are staying in the workforce longer. We're retiring later. We're living longer. Probably, you're gonna have to reinvent yourself several times during the course of your career. So I think it's an important thing for people to realize.

0:20:14 Whitney: Yeah.

0:20:16 Jacob: So okay. So you talked about seven steps. The first one is taking the right risk. Which I think... A lot of people would struggle with this one because of course, it's easy to say, "Take a risk," but you need to take a right risk. So how do you figure out what those right risks are?

0:20:31 Whitney: Yeah. It's a great question. So let me just... We think... There's two kinds of risks that I outlined. One is competitive risk, where you... If you're thinking about a product, you know there's an opportunity, you've scoped it out, you've got the projections to prove it. You now just have to figure out if you can compete and win. And so, that might look like in a job where you look on LinkedIn and you say, "Okay there's a job posting. I know there's a job. I have to figure out if I can compete and win." Market risk on the other hand is you don't know if there's a market. You have no idea there's demand for this, but if there is, there's no competition. And what we know from the theory of disruption is that when you take on market risk, and again, this is for products, the odds of your success are six times higher and your revenue opportunity 20 times greater. And so extrapolating from that, it's also going to be true for you as an individual is if you're willing to take on market risk. And one of the ways that you can think about this is you're focusing on what you're

creating rather than what you're competing or rather than competing.

0:21:38 Whitney: Amateurs compete, and professionals create. And so the way that you wanna think about this from a personal disruption perspective is, what are you going after? What are you undertaking that isn't about "I wanna win just to win"? 'Cause there are things that we wanna win just to win. But more of, "How can I contribute? And what do I want to create?" And when we're willing to stay in that place from a head-game perspective, we are much more likely to be successful from this idea of disrupting ourselves.

0:22:08 Jacob: I love it. I think that makes a lot of sense. Okay, so I guess taking the right risks, like for example in your case, how did you know, and I suppose you didn't know, but leaving Wall Street to become an entrepreneur, what was your thought process like when you were evaluating that risk? Did you have several different choices? Just quit and go work for another firm? How did you process that?

0:22:29 Whitney: Yeah. So Jacob, I think that the short answer is, is that a lot of this was intuitive. So one of the things is that you do things and then you look back and you go, "Oh, that wasn't so smart. Let me see if I can figure out a better process for this." And I think it does go to... Sometimes we get to the top of an S-curve, and we can just feel deep in our gut that we have to do something new, we can't necessarily explain it. Ideally, we're gonna look at and evaluate the risk, but just be aware that somewhere you're just gonna have to jump. What I will say is the way I've consciously thought about it as I sort of developed this theory and studied under Clayton is, I remember when I started a blog back in 2006, 2007, and it was called Dare to Dream, and it was really focused on women and how do you go after a dream. And I remember thinking, "Well, what do I do with this? 'Cause I can't find a place to put this. It doesn't fall into any specific genre."

0:23:33 Whitney: And I kept on wanting to find a true genre, and I realized, "No, this is market risk that you're taking." And that's kind of what it feels like. You're like, "There's nothing out there. I don't know what to do with this." That's when you know you're taking market risk. Now, again, it may not work. When you look at this theory, there's still a 60% chance it's not gonna work, but the odds that it does work are higher when you are creating the play ground and invite people to come play with you as opposed to just saying, "I'm gonna go after this thing that other people are doing."

0:24:03 Jacob: And it sounds like a part of this is understanding that you may make mistakes. You may sometimes choose the wrong path, and then you might have to kind of rebound. So how do you deal with that? What happens if you take a risk, and it ends up being a terrible choice? It's very easy for people to get deflated and upset and discouraged. Can you share anything like how do you... What type of mindset that you need to have so that if you take that wrong path, you don't just quit.

0:24:31 Whitney: Yeah. Oh, Jacob, it's such a good question. So I think there's a couple of thoughts that I have there, and number one is every time you jump to a brand new S-curve and you do something new, even if it doesn't work, almost always there is something that you've learned. And I would encourage everybody who's listening to this today, it's likely that there is a success that you have had in your life or are currently having that would not be possible without something that failed, something that you learned because of that failure. So that would be the first thing I would say. The second thing is a bigger challenge, is that we actually all fail all the time. If you look at today, you've failed dozens of times today, possibly hundreds of times. So the challenge, I think, for most of us isn't that we fail 'cause we make mistakes all day long, it's the fact that there are certain failures that go to our identity and how we define ourselves, which then triggers shame. And so it's

the shame that limits the disruption. It's not failure.

0:25:40 Whitney: So what I would say is that when we start feeling... We do something and it doesn't work, and then that triggers shame, one of the things that we wanna do is say, "Okay, what's happening here? How am I making meaning of this?" It's likely that we're gonna have to do some inner work. And so one of the goals that I've set for myself or the metrics of success for me is, in any given week, is my number of times that I get shamed around things that didn't work, is it going down over time? 'Cause if it's going down over time, then that means I'm successfully disrupting myself and my sense of identity is getting more and more intact. And for me, that's one of the biggest reasons that we disrupt ourselves is so that our identity does not hinge on what other people say or do. It's just that we fundamentally value who we are.

0:26:28 Jacob: I love it. Well, before we jump into the next one, actually, I thought of a question that I wanted to ask you. And that's, so you do a lot of work with executives, with various leaders, coaching, advisory, stuff like that. What are some of the most common things that these business leaders come to you for? What do they need help with the most?

0:26:50 Whitney: There are two things, I would say. One of them is they're trying to get things done inside of their organization, and there are people that are making it difficult for them to get things done. And so, at some level, some form or fashion, and this will go to one of the guard rails that we're talking about, this idea of battling entitlement and embracing constraints, they're trying to get things done. They can't see any way to get it done, and they need coaching to help them figure out how to navigate to make things happen. And it almost always reveals blind spots, both weaknesses and strengths. So that's one instance where people come to us. But I would say the bigger one, and this was actually a realistic thing because when a couple of years ago someone said to me, "So, why do people hire you?" And I thought, "Well, they hire us because they need to disrupt themselves. They need to do something differently."

0:27:45 Whitney: And I started then looking at who had actually hired us, and I realized, "Oh, actually, the people that are hiring us are the people who are already growing very fast and they wanna grow faster." So it's like it goes back to your 1%, 37 times. They're like, "No, things are going well. I just wanna get better faster. Can you help me get better faster?" I'm like, "Yeah, if you're willing to disrupt yourself even more, you can get better even faster." So those are the people who typically come to us, and we find that we're able to be really helpful.

0:28:16 Jacob: And when you say get better faster...

0:28:19 Whitney: What do I mean?

0:28:20 Jacob: Yeah. Are there particular areas? Are they trying to become better leaders, better communicators? Are there specific buckets that they're trying to get better in?

0:28:30 Whitney: That's a great question. I would say, Jacob, I think it ultimately is that they want to be a better leader. They want to be more effective. They want to able to either... Sometimes it's more they have a sense of who they are and who they can be, and they're not quite there. Other times it's a sense of, "Okay, our company is growing really fast, and our revenue is growing at 100%, and I need to make sure that I can keep up and my people can keep up." And so it's more of just, "How can I be more effective?"

0:29:12 Jacob: Got it. Okay. Okay, so the second part of the S-curve was, "Play to the Strengths." And I love this because I know in a lot of organizations, it's very tempting for us to focus on the weaknesses that other people have and to try to, you know, "How do you improve your weaknesses? Oh, you're not good at this. You gotta get better at that." And rarely do we say, "Hey, you know what? You're really good at this. Why don't you focus on this instead?"

0:29:35 Whitney: Yeah.

0:29:36 Jacob: So, how do you play to those strengths? And I suppose this is relevant if you're a leader and you want other people to play to their strengths or just an individual and you wanna play to your own strengths.

0:29:46 Whitney: Right. So I think the first thing, to your point, yeah, exactly right. And when you think about 360s, and as soon as... So often I see this with 360s, they flip, flip, flip, flip, flip, flip, flip. There are pages of things that they do well, and people immediately go to the things that they don't do well. And I think this goes, again, to that identity question. What I would say is that, yes, we do need to know what we don't do well. But I think what we don't do well, there are sort of different buckets. There are things that we admit we don't do well that are not a big deal, and then there are things that we don't well that are derailers. So we need to mitigate those derailers 'cause those can kick us off the curve, and those oftentimes come up. And so you want to remediate those. But where you really are going to have impact and get bang for your buck is to understand what you do well.

0:30:44 Whitney: And that's oftentimes people don't recognize it because it's reflexive and they don't value it. But you've gotta understand what you do well, lean into it, double down on it. We've got, wherever you go, a lot of neural pathways, you can have a lot more neural pathways, where you've got strengths, you've got a lot more strengths. And when you're willing to own those strengths and then put people in positions where they've got to do something really hard that leverages those strengths, that's when you're gonna get an outside's contribution. But it takes a lot of focus.

0:31:13 Jacob: So we had a question come in. I put it up on the screen. I don't know if you can see it, from Christopher Rashard. He says, "Fantastic chat. Thank you. In terms of accelerating disruption with your help, do you see any patterns in terms of life stage, career stage or age?"

0:31:31 Whitney: Yeah. It's a great question. I love it. So, here's what I would say. I think that... Oh, there's so many ways I can answer that question. So if you think about it from an S-curve perspective, I would say that people who are early in their career and usually younger, they tend to be very good at trying new things, but oftentimes they don't yet have the resilience or the thought pattern or the pattern recognition to know what it looks like. Whereas people who are later in their career, they might be more reluctant to disrupt themselves because they've got more to lose. They've got stature, they've got status, etcetera. They also, if they're willing, have disrupted themselves over and over again, hence, they've got that pattern recognition. They know how to do it. So, at the beginning, they don't know how to do it, but it's relatively easy for them because there's less to lose. But later in your career, you know how to do it and there's more to lose. And so you've got to figure out how to balance those two.

0:32:38 Jacob: Okay, makes sense. Okay. So, we talked about taking the right risks, playing to the strengths, which is essential. So, I think, for everybody listening, focus on the things that you're

good at. I had to personally learn this over time, and I'm sure you can relate, Whitney, when you first start off your own business, you tend to do everything yourself.

0:32:54 Whitney: Yes.

0:32:55 Jacob: And you're a team of one. And so I used to have to do everything myself, create proposals, sell, manage calendar, just everything. And I'm bad at probably 90% of those things, so I had to bring in other people who are genuinely good at those things and can do them much better than me. So, I think for everyone listening or watching, surround yourself with people who can do the things that maybe you're not so good at, and just admit that you're not good at those things. [chuckle] Don't try to make yourself to be out this perfect person that doesn't have any flaws.

0:33:28 Whitney: I agree.

0:33:30 Jacob: Next is "Embrace Constraints."

0:33:33 Whitney: Yeah.

0:33:34 Jacob: So this is the third step in the S-curve. What does that actually mean, embrace your constraints?

0:33:40 Whitney: Alright. So as you're moving along this S-curve, you're playing where no one else is playing, taking those risks that increase your odds of success. You're leveraging your strengths, and you feel strong. You're willing to play where no one else is playing. Now this is the place where you start to gain momentum, and there's this tendency to say, "Well, if I had more time or more money or more buy-in from my stakeholders or more expertise, then I could climb that S-curve." What we know from the financial law of physics is that you actually need something to bump up against. You need friction, you need constraints in order to gain the momentum that you need to move forward. And it's also true here. And so, what I am advocating here is that as you come up against constraints, which you will, which certainly we are right now, the question is to ask yourself not, "Why is this thing happening? Why don't I have enough money?" but, "What can I create because I don't have enough money."

0:34:35 Whitney: Great example of this that I just love, and you'll know why in just a second is, we all know a film that was produced by Steven Spielberg. He was over budget, completely behind schedule. The mechanical shark that he wanted to use, it didn't work. And so he finally had to shoot all the scenes from the shark's point of view, and let the music... We all know what it is. It was "Jaws." And our imagination do the rest. And I think often about that movie of like, if they hadn't had all those constraints, it probably would have been sort of a "bleurgh" movie. But with the constraints, it became a classic. And I think that there are many things right now for us during this disruption, if we look at what we don't have enough of, that can actually be the thing that we create with... That's going to create something quite innovative and unexpected. I remember Clayton Christensen, who I've spoken about earlier on this podcast... Or not a podcast, this conversation that we're having is that he said that this great recession, I think this pandemic would have an unmitigated positive impact on innovation because when the tension is greatest, we're actually the most willing to try something and re-imagine how we're doing business. And I think that's very exciting.

0:35:50 Jacob: Yeah. No, I think it makes a lot of sense. And it made me think actually a lot of... I

know this might sound kind of weird, but like daily gratitude, because a lot of people are constantly thinking about things that they don't have and things that they wish they had, but the flip side of that is to just think of all the things that you do have and to be grateful for those.

0:43:30 Whitney: Completely agree.

0:43:31 Jacob: Yeah. So when I think of the constraints, it's sort of like don't think that you don't have enough money, you don't have enough time, you don't have enough budget. Think instead, "Here's how much time I do have. Here's how much budget I do have. Here's what I can do." And sort of flip it around a little bit. So I love that approach. Next one, which I know a lot of people are gonna be interested in, which is "Battle Entitlement."

0:43:56 Whitney: Yeah.

0:43:58 Jacob: What is that one about?

0:44:00 Whitney: So there are a lot of different ways that you can think about this. So battling entitlement or entitlement is a belief that somehow I am less than or more than someone else. And it looks like us basically treating other people as objects, not people. And there's lots of ways it can show up. It can show up as simply as I go outside, I think I'm not gonna get COVID-19, so I don't wear a mask. I'm preferencing my feelings above others because they're worried about getting it. I'm not wearing a mask. I'm treating them as an object and not a person. But when it comes to really moving up the S-curve and driving disruption, it might look like I wanna do something new. I wanna take on a new assignment, but the only way I'm thinking about this is, "What's in it for me? It's gonna help my career. I'm gonna do X, Y and Z." But I'm not thinking about my stakeholders and how it will impact them. And then conversely, it can look like I have someone around me who wants to try something new. And I'm like, "No, no, no, no." I block them from doing it because it will inconvenience me. In that moment, they become an object as opposed to a person.

0:45:11 Whitney: And the reason that this is such a problem is if you go back to the first accelerant of creating rather than competing. When I think I'm more important or less important, I'm competing. I'm trying to maintain my status or make my status better. Whereas if I really believe that all men and women are created equal with these inalienable rights, then I focus only on creating. I focus only on what I can contribute because I'm not trying to get ahead. I'm just trying to move forward. So that's why this idea of battling our sense of an entitlement is so important.

0:45:50 Jacob: So in other words, it's not just about you.

[laughter]

0:45:54 Whitney: Yes, bingo. Thank you, Jacob, for summing that up so beautifully.

0:45:58 Jacob: Well, and I keep going back to analogies. So on the cover of my book, which I'm gonna grab now…So here I go, people can see this. It's a lighthouse.

0:46:12 Whitney: Oh, my God.

0:46:13 Jacob: And one of the reasons why I wanted to put a lighthouse is pretty much for the exact reason that you just said is because a lighthouse without ships in the water is useless. And so,

if you are building yourself up to be the lighthouse and learning all these new things and forgetting that in order to be successful you need those other people in the water, you need those ships in the water that you're guiding and helping make more successful, then you as the lighthouse are useless. And you can be the biggest, shiniest, brightest lighthouse in the world, but without ships, there's really no reason for you to exist.

0:46:45 Whitney: Yeah.

0:46:47 Jacob: When you say battle entitlement, especially for leaders, that's kind of what I think of is kind of a lighthouse. So the next one here we have is "Step Back and Grow."

0:47:00 Whitney: Yeah. Well, we kind of talked about this a little bit, but it's the notion that when you step back, if you crouch before you jump, you bring a fist back to punch, you basically step back to slingshot forward. And if you look at the math of disruption, think of it as a grid paper, what you're doing is you're on the Y-axis of success at a 12 and you're over one up one, over one up one, and that might be perfectly fine. But when you disrupt yourself, you're saying, "You know what? If I'm willing to go down to eight, then maybe I can start doing over one up three or over one up five. I believe that the slope of my line will be steeper." And so, you disrupt yourself. You take that step back so you can slingshot forward. It can be on your career. It can be on your business. It can be for you individually as a person. If I'm willing to take a step back, get up earlier every day to spend time writing on a book, then I can slingshot forward and actually get a book published, for example.

0:48:00 Jacob: There was, I don't know if it was a meme or an image that was floating around a little bit. It was trending, and it's constantly always trending, but it's this... And you may have seen it, and it was this image that says, "What most people think success looks like," and it's kind of a straight line going up. And then next to it says, "What success actually looks like," and it's just like down and up and sideways, and it's not a linear, straight path like a lot of people assume.

0:48:29 Whitney: Yeah, yeah.

0:48:31 Jacob: So we got another question come through. This is an interesting one from Rich, and he wants to know, does social media and other technologies, can they play a role at all in becoming a high-growth individual or in this kind of self-disruption?

0:48:47 Whitney: Yeah. I think absolutely, Rich. That is such an interesting question. I've never thought of it before, but let me just tell you the thought that immediately comes to mind. I remember a couple of years ago, I decided that I wasn't gonna eat sugar for a year and, 'cause, well, I still really like sugar, but I decided that year I'm not gonna eat any sugar. And so I thought, "There is no way I'm gonna pull this off if I don't create some social accountability." So I went out on social media, and I was like, "Hey, everybody. I'm not gonna eat sugar for a year." And as you... I know, Jacob, you said you've listened to my LinkedIn Live a couple of times. I have for everybody who comes to that, I say, "Okay, if there's something you wanna be accountable for, why don't you share with us that you're gonna be accountable for and you're gonna get this done by two days from now? Say it publicly." And then they get to report back. So I think that that's a way. And I don't know that's super social media, but to me that's sort of this public accounting. I think it can be very helpful in disrupting ourselves, and I'm sure that there are many more ways, but that's what comes to mind immediately.

0:49:49 Jacob: Yeah, I think accountability, just learning all the tools and resources we have at our

disposal to learn new things, things like this podcast, videos, Khan Academy, you can do anything. And also just connecting with people like this. One of the reasons why I started this podcast years ago to begin with was to learn from people such as yourself and business leaders and authors who come on, sharing their expertise. And I get to learn from it, too, so it's... There's a lot of really interesting ways that we can use social technologies that are out there. So the next... Well, actually we've got another question here on the role of Grit, the focus of a popular book published by Angela Duckworth. It seems like disrupting yourself, you do need a little bit of that grittiness in there, don't you?

0:50:38 Whitney: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I loved that book, by the way. So good. Yeah, 100%. Grit is... And it's been a couple of years since I read it, but this idea of resilience that I think goes back to what we were talking about this notion of failure earlier, is when something doesn't work and it won't, what do you do? Are you able to bounce back? Is it about your identity, or is it just a piece of data that allows you to get better? So I think grit is integral to the process.

0:51:09 Jacob: The next step we have is "Give Failure Its Due," which I think we talked about a little bit, but maybe we can expand on it just a touch.

0:51:18 Whitney: Yeah, the thing that I would say about that is just that there's this iterative process that I... I think about the fact that the up and the down are part of personal disruption. I think about all the things that haven't emerged, whether it's me bombing a speech or getting fired from a job or investing in a company that completely went belly up. I think there are really important, valuable lessons for me to learn from that. And so the question becomes is, "Okay, so when you have that failure, what's the return on failure?" And then as we said earlier, it's really the shame that's in the disruption. It's not the failure. So it's like, "How do you ditch the shame and allow the failure to be there?" Because the more you're willing to fail means the faster that you're experimenting, the more you're experimenting and the better you'll get. You'll get better faster. That's what I wanted to say. [chuckle]

0:52:14 Jacob: So separating the act of failing with the emotional response of shame.

0:52:20 Whitney: Exactly.

0:52:21 Jacob: 'Cause those are two different... Okay. I'm actually curious, have you ever bombed a speech?

0:52:27 Whitney: Yes, I have. In fact, so...

0:52:30 Jacob: Now you have to share.

0:52:31 Whitney: Do you wanna swap stories? So I remember this was about... It wasn't that long ago. Well, I guess in the life cycle of my speaking, I've been speaking for about seven years. So this is probably about four years ago, and I gave a speech. And it was in front of actually people in the financial services sector, and I came from the financial services sector. And when I got finished, it was just so quiet. And I was like, "Wow, this did not go well." A couple days later, I get a call from my agent and they're like, "Not a single person put you down as a speech of their life. You were the worst speech." And they're like, "Here are all the comment cards." Like automaton. They were just like, "It was terrible." And I remember... And it was awful, as you can imagine, but at the same time, I realized I needed that to happen. And the reason is, is that the content wasn't that different.

The content was good, but I needed it to be that bad to get my attention, so that I wouldn't continue being good enough. It would force me to take a step back and really figure out what I needed to do differently, so I could slingshot forward. What's your story?

0:53:45 Jacob: Oh, man.

0:53:46 Whitney: Do you have a bombed story? [chuckle]

0:53:48 Jacob: Yeah, I have several. I have some funny ones and some similar to one. Well, one funny one is I remember I gave a talk for 2000 people once and then afterwards, they gave me the comments and the feedback forms. And then they're like... I think it was on a scale of five. And they gave me the feedback form back, and my score was like a two. [chuckle] But the thing that was weird is that after my talk, I had lots of people come up to me and say, "Oh, we loved your speech. Everything was great." And so I got this feedback from the client, and I said, "You know, it's really hard for me to understand how I got a two. Can you please send me the comments? Can you please send me the actual survey?" And so they sent me the survey. And, so from the 2000 people in attendance, I think it was like 80 people filled out the form. Okay? So we're talking about a very small percentage of people who filled it out.

0:54:40 Whitney: Yeah.

0:54:41 Jacob: And I started looking at the comments of why they started rating my speech as negative. One person said it was too dark in the room. Somebody else said that they thought there should've been a longer break. Somebody else complained about food. Somebody... So in other words, a lot of these comments had nothing to do with me.

0:55:00 Whitney: At all.

0:55:01 Jacob: But they were just upset in general about the circumstance and the situation.

0:55:06 Whitney: Yeah.

0:55:06 Jacob: And I think context actually matters a lot, not just why you get negative feedback, but is the negative feedback... Put it into context.

0:55:16 Whitney: Right.

0:55:17 Jacob: But then, of course...

0:55:17 Whitney: But just so you know, the speech that I bombed, it wasn't too dark in the room. [laughter]

0:55:21 Jacob: Well, I mean I've also had other speeches where it's like... I remember when I first started speaking, I wore suits that were too big. I paced back and forth uncontrollably and I was nervous. I've done a speech before where sometimes I let the organizers dictate my content instead of doing what I know is gonna resonate best, which is what I've done. So I've had all sorts of situations like that. But you're right. You need those things to happen, so that you can eventually become stronger and better on the other side of it.

0:55:57 Whitney: Yeah, to get your attention. That's for sure.

0:55:58 Jacob: Yeah. And the same thing I think is true in a work environment as well. If you have a leader or your peers are always giving you great feedback, it's kinda weird. Eventually you're gonna get to a point where somebody is going to just be honest with you, and you're gonna need to hear that, so that you can get out of your own head space a little bit.

0:56:18 Whitney: Agreed.

0:56:19 Jacob: So, next was, so "Give Failure Its Due." So just to quickly recap there, the whole point everybody is that, don't... It's not the failure that's bad. It's the feeling that we oftentimes associate with a failure, of shame, of negativity, of like, "I'm not good enough." And a lot of organizations now, I know they're actually creating failure awards. They're embracing failure, showcasing failure. So use it more as a... Basically, change the way that we think about failure. Kind of a badge of honor instead of the scarlet letter, I guess.

0:56:50 Whitney: Yeah. Well said.

0:56:53 Jacob: The next question or the next step here is "Be Discovery-Driven."

0:57:00 Whitney: Yeah, okay. So this is the last one. This is number seven, and this is the idea of, basically, when you're playing where no one else is playing that means that you don't... You're creating a yet-to-be-defined market. You don't know where you're going, which is okay, because 70% of all successful new businesses end up in a totally different place too. And I think this one's especially important right now, this notion of taking a step forward, gather feedback and adapt, because we're all walking into the unknown. We're always walking into the unknown, but we really are right now. And so are we able to just say, "Okay, today I'm gonna take a step forward. And today I'm gonna gather feedback. And tonight I'm going to tweak what I'm planning on doing tomorrow, based on what I learned about how I operated today, or how I did on the conversation that Jacob and I are having," for example. And just taking that in and gathering that feedback and adapting. And we tend to think that we're better at it than we think that we are. I know now a couple.

0:58:04 Whitney: Last year I had Brené Brown on my podcast and getting through the interview, and she's talking about this idea of how do you know if you're good at being vulnerable. And she said, "Take this question to others: What do I do when I'm uncertain and scared?" So I go to my family, and I'm like, "What do I do when I'm uncertain and scared." They're like, "Well, you micro-manage. Actually, you nano-manage. You get hyper-critical." And I'm like, "Ooh, I do those things kind of a lot." So that means that I'm uncertain a lot, which is bad 'cause now I've got to work on them. But it also said to me, "Oh, that means that I'm being discovery-driven. So now I just need to be aware, work on those, but then also know, just keep going. That's a marker that I'm going into the unknown. That's a marker that I'm moving forward." And so that's what I would say to all of, everybody who's listening right now. If you're doing those things that tell you that you're feeling uncertain, just be aware of it and say, "Good job, keep going." 'Cause that's where we need to go, is we need to go in that disruptive place.

0:59:00 Jacob: Okay, this also makes me think a lot of self-awareness.

0:59:03 Whitney: Yes.

0:59:04 Jacob: You need to be aware of, like you said, how you act, what makes you feel a certain way, because without that you're not gonna be able to really identify any of these things.

0:59:14 Whitney: Yeah, it's true.

0:59:15 Jacob: Okay, so self-awareness here is essential. Okay, so those are the seven steps. I know we're at the top of hour. Do you have just a couple...

0:59:23 Whitney: I do, I do.

0:59:24 Jacob: Okay, so a couple more minutes before we wrap up. Next, question I have for you... And so that's the Seven-Step Framework. And I think if people even google it, they can find many things that you've written about the S-curve, the Seven Steps, the Self-Disruption Framework. I was able to find lots of images.

0:59:43 Whitney: Yeah. Jacob, just quickly. If people want to recap it in a nutshell, if you go to whitneyjohnson.com/calm, C-A-L-M, so calm amidst the chaos, it talks through each of those accelerants.

1:00:00 Jacob: Ah, perfect.

1:00:01 Whitney: So if people wanna download that.

1:00:03 Jacob: Okay, cool. So next question for you is, are there any mistakes that people or that you see people make when they try to become a high-growth individual, like any common pitfalls?

1:00:14 Whitney: Yeah, we get impatient. [chuckle]

1:00:18 Whitney: I'm thinking, I'm thinking back to your, your 1% and you'll get 37 times better. I remember reading research and it sounds that James Clear also talking about this idea of the cumulative and compounding effect and I was like, "Well, I wanna do this." And so I started running January of last year, I was like, "I'm gonna do five minutes a day." And up until that time, I would get really impatient, like, "I've gotta get good at running fast." I'm like, "No, no, I'm just gonna do 1% per day," and so, 'cause I wanna run a 5K. Well, impatient me would have been like, "I need to run a 5K by April," so April 2019, now we're in what, May of 2020? I have not run a 5K but this morning or yesterday, when I ran, I was at 39 minutes. I've gone from five minutes to 39 minutes because I've been patient. So I think for anybody who wants to be a high-growth individual, it's that idea of interest and compounding effect is just put in the time, day after day after day, and you will suddenly become that high-growth individual you wanna be.

1:01:27 Jacob: You gotta be patient. I am pretty obsessed with chess, and chess is one of those virtually limitless games, and so I've been playing or taking chess lessons for several years now. And it can be very, very frustrating because you keep thinking that, "Okay, if I study for a year or two years, I should be great," but there are people out there, great chess players who've been studying for 15 years, 20 years, 40 years. So I think studying something like that, it's working on teaching me to be patient. So I'm trying to practice.

1:02:00 Whitney: Oh, I love that you've got that chessboard right behind you. That's it, that's such a fitting visual.

1:02:06 Jacob: Oh yeah, my grandmother gave me that, she lives in Australia.

1:02:08 Whitney: Oh, wow, that's so sweet.

1:02:11 Jacob: Yeah, alright next question for you, is the difference between growth during times of adversity versus growth during times of prosperity, is there a difference between trying to become a high-growth individual when things are going well, versus when things are terrible?

1:02:27 Whitney: Yeah, so I would say when things are going well, it's slightly easier, but we don't do it because things are easy, and we get complacent. I think they... So that's sort of, that's the opportunity when things are going well. I think when things are difficult, we've got a lot more constraints and so it's easier to grow fast. Now the challenge is and we just had David Peters in our podcast who does leadership at Google, and this idea of when you get to the bottom of that S-curve of learning because you don't know what you're doing, and you feel very uncertain, the tendency is to a go into performance mode and performance mode, you're not learning anything. And so when we're in a period like this, there are all these inputs for us to learn, and so are we able to stay in learning mode? And I think this is where journaling becomes so important 'cause if we can stay in learning mode, then we can grow a lot faster during this time. And there's a lot of sort of externalities that are driving that in times where there, we're prosperous, we can, but we don't have the external sort of pushing us and forcing us to do so. It has to, has to be more internal.

1:03:35 Jacob: Okay, and maybe one last question for you before I ask where people can go to connect with you. And this is specifically for leaders who are listening. Do you have any advice or suggestions for what they can do to help get their people to become high-growth individuals?

1:03:53 Whitney: Yeah.

1:03:53 Jacob: What should they be doing internally?

1:03:54 Whitney: Yeah, so I think the first thing I would do is, first of all, we've got this thing, the scurvelocator.com and you can just have your team, the people on your team take that and figure out where they are on their current S-curve and then say to yourself, "Okay, do I think they're on the the launch point, the sweet spot, or the high-end?" Have them take it, ask them where they think they are, and have the conversation, use this as an artifact to have a conversation around, "You're on this S-curve. Is this the right S-curve? If it is, how do we help you grow faster, gain momentum along that S-curve. And if it's the wrong S-curve, how do we get you onto the right one, so that you can continue to grow faster?" So I think that's a great starting point, is just to start thinking in your mind, where is every single person I work with on my team on their part S-curve and what can I do to help them gain momentum? If they're at the launch point they're probably gonna need encouragement, if they're on the sweet spot, they need me to help them focus, learn how to delegate, and if they're at the high end, they need me to challenge them, so what am I gonna do to challenge them?

1:04:56 Jacob: Okay, so understanding basically where your employees are on the S-curve, okay, makes a lot of sense. And I suppose you also need to lead by example, right? As a leader you need to show that you're doing this yourself.

1:05:08 Whitney: Right. Yeah, if you're at the top of your S-curve and you're super complacent,

then you're not doing anything to push yourself back into the sweet spot, trying to get your people to grow and develop is gonna be hard. It's just like, as a parent, right? You're saying to your kids grow, develop, dream. Well, your children can't dream unless you dream, your people can't disrupt unless you disrupt.

1:05:27 Jacob: Yeah, yup, totally agree. Well, Whitney, we've been chatting for the full hour now. Why don't you let people know where they can go to learn more about you or connect with you or your book, anything that you wanna mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

1:05:42 Whitney: Oh, thank you Jacob. I think two suggestions I would make is, number one, we've talked about a number of podcast episodes, so if you wanted to go to whitneyjohnson.com, you can find... We have a whole podcast episode on the right risks, this episode 100 on distinctive strengths, episode 120 if you wanna listen to those. If you're like, "Oh, I just wanted sort of a brief on the different experiments of personal disruption", you can download whitneyjohnson.com/calm, that's probably the best route for you to learn a little bit more and dive deeper on these ideas.

1:06:17 Jacob: Very cool, thanks again for taking time out of your day to join me and share all your wonderful insights and ideas and stories.

1:06:25 Whitney: Oh Jacob, thank you for having me.

1:06:27 Jacob: My pleasure, and thanks everyone for tuning in. Again, my guest has been Whitney Johnson, make sure to check out her book, her site, her new book, Disrupt Yourself. She's super easy to find, and I would also recommend connecting with her or following her on LinkedIn, and joining the almost two million people, which is insane, that you have two million people who are following you on LinkedIn, so congratulations, and hopefully people will join you and connect with you on there.

1:06:54 Whitney: Thank you.

1:06:55 Jacob: Alright everyone, see you next time.

1:06:57 Whitney: Bye.